

Volume 165

February 2016



INDIANAPOLIS BONSAI CLUB

# The Bonsai Creation

# Suiseki+



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# From the President

Well, I guess winter decided to arrive after all! Our January meeting had an unusually high turnout. Attendance is often lower during the winter months, but we'd been lucky with unusually mild weather. I guess winter decided to be fashionably late. I'm writing this message late in the afternoon, I spent a good portion of today chipping out my car and my driveway. A few days ago, temperatures were in the upper 40s and today we are down to single digits. Still, mother nature has been kinder this year than the past two years. I shouldn't complain.

Despite some technical difficulties, Mike Thiedeman had an interesting presentation on bonsai pottery. While the other guys were busy working on the projector and the computer, I was able to draw out my short presentation on viewing stones. I think I managed to spark some interest in suiseki, and several of you asked some really good questions. Perhaps one day, I will do a full presentation on suiseki, but this year is packed. Included in this newsletter is one of my past articles on viewing stones. I hope you enjoy it.

For the February meeting, we are going to do something new and fun. I'm sure Mike's January presentation sparked interest in bonsai pottery. For our upcoming meeting, IBC members will have their chance to try their hand at bonsai pottery. We will be making small pots with can be used for a shohin bonsai or a kusamono. Rather than throwing pots on a wheel, we will be using either the slab method or the pinch pot method for creating these small pots. Paul Weishaar will be doing a short presentation to give you guidelines for this project. You want a pot that looks good, but you also need one that is functional. If a plant is going to live in there, the pot will need to have adequate drain holes and maybe feet, and wire hole, too. After Paul's short presentation, we will get to work.

The cost for the upcoming workshop will be just five dollars. This will cover the cost of the clay and the firing. You will leave your pots at the

meeting that night, and when they are dry enough to be moved, Paul will take them and have them fired. You should be able to pick your pots up at the following meeting. Eventually, these pots can be used either for a shohin tree or for the kusamono workshop which will be happening during the April club meeting.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the February meeting.

Scott Yelich



**Indianapolis Bonsai Club**  
**January 6th, 2016**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Amanda Cox**

**Date & Time:** January 6th, 2016 from 7:00-9:00

**Location:** Garfield Park Conservatory Meeting Room

**Presiding:** Club President Scott Yelich

**Attendance:** 35

**Membership:** 54 paid households in 2015

**Checking/Savings Balance:** \$10,655.76

**February Meeting:** Pinch Pots

**Short Program:** Suiseki/Viewing Stones Presented by: Scott Yelich

**Regular Program:** Bonsai Pottery Presented by: Mike Thiedeman

# Turface versus Akadama

**Mark Fields**

My opinion concerning Turface is based on my experience using it over the past 10 years or so. I know many who use it as their sole growing media. I did try doing that after I found out about it and it seemed to work well for a couple of years. So well that I started repotting all of my trees into it. Huge mistake!

After a few years I started losing some of them. Then I noticed others beginning to suffer. Most of the trees I lost, some of my favorites by the way, never woke up after I removed them from winter storage. Upon examining the roots of the trees lost, the first thing I noticed was that the root mass was absolutely soaked. Secondly, most of the roots were shredded and just mush! I began checking the roots of other trees in Turface, some of which were struggling, others seemed fine, I noticed the same thing. Very wet, shredded, mushy roots. The good thing I noticed as a result of Turface was the proliferation of fine roots.

After the death of some trees and irreversible damage to others, with some prodding from European bonsai artist, Danny Use, I gave akadama a try. Using his various formulations, using absolutely no organic matter in the mix at all. Then I began the grueling process of taking everything, conifers and deciduous trees, out of Turface and repotting them in akadama mixes.

That's when I saw the biggest difference ever in all of my trees! At that time I also began using the fertilizing regimen taught to me by Danny as well. Never have my trees looked better! If you have ever been to my nursery, I think that you will notice that the health of my trees shows.

Turface is used in my tropical and nursery mix in a ratio of one part each of Turface, pine bark fines and either haydite or lava rock.

Because of its property to produce lots of fine roots, I continue use Turface to start seeds in. They are left in the tubs I germinate them in for no longer than 2 years.

Turface is perfect for producing humidity for shohin bonsai during the hottest part of the summer. Purchase black plastic concrete mixing tubs and drill several small holes in the bottom for drainage. Then fill the tubs 2/3 full with Turface. Thoroughly saturate the Turface and sink the pots of the shohin trees in the Turface. Roots from the trees will grow into the Turface in search of extra moisture. Those roots should be removed every month or so. I also store my deciduous and conifer shohin trees in those same tubs for winter storage. The pots are sunk into the Turface to the top of the pot.

Again, this is my opinion and I know many growers who continue to use Turface with great results. In my climate, central Indiana, USDA Zone 6B, under the conditions I grow my trees, it does not work for me. It's a death sentence! Akadama, mixed with other pumices such as kiryu, hyuga and similar pumices, is the only way to go.

I sell and use only hard akadama, Ryusen brand and others. It is fired to over 300C.

The properties of Turface and akadama are not even close to being the same. If you look at each under the microscope, you would see that akadama has a tubular structure, while Turface is layered.

Water flows freely through akadama particles and it retains water and will readily give it up to the roots. You will also notice that when you repot trees that have been grown in akadama, roots will actually have grown through the akadama granules.

Turface will absorb and hold onto water but will not give it up to the roots when needed. The water flows around the Turface particles and the roots grow around them. Turface particles are flat and sharp. As a result, when saturated with water and allowed to freeze, will shred the roots.

Many people have told me that akadama breaks down to mud after it experiences freeze/thaw cycles. That's a myth! My own observation is that it indeed does break down on the surface. In the spring as I am bringing the trees out of winter storage, I use a small broom to remove the pulverized particles on the surface. You will observe that the akadama particles below that are intact. After that, a fresh coat of the original mix is added on the surface.

Another trick I learned from Danny Use and while studying in Japan is to coat the surface of the pumice mix with long fiber sphagnum moss pulverized to a powder when bone dry. Then it is wetted down so that the wind won't blow it off the surface. This allows the pumice mix to stay moister longer which results in the trees roots to inhabit the top one third of the potting media. This is done when I repot and when I bring them out of winter storage.

Another thing I noticed was, even after the trees have been growing in akadama and pumice for almost a decade, experiencing brutally cold winter temperatures, the particles below the surface, within the root mass are intact.

In conclusion, I hope that you understand that this is just my opinion. I hope that others agree with me that Turface is NOT a substitute for akadama. Akadama pumice blends are the best substrates to pot your bonsai in. Turface does have some uses in bonsai culture. Just not as the sole ingredient.

It surprises me that people will pay hundreds if not thousands of dollars on a bonsai and won't spend \$50 to \$60 on a bag of the akadama blend to grow it in! Many experienced growers can verify the fact that it is the perfect growing medium to grow your trees in. Please consider using it,

# What to do...

**Mark Fields**

***Bonsai by Fields***

It may be the coldest month of the year, but there are things you should be doing with your bonsai. Depending on where you are keeping your deciduous and conifer trees during the winter, you should pay close attention to their moisture levels.

I have a rather sizable collection so I have trees stored in my 2 outdoor white poly huts, one for the deciduous trees and one for the conifer trees. The huts are for keeping the wind and weather from harming the trees. The good thing about the huts is that the temperature inside stays 10 – 20 degrees higher than the outdoor temperature. You really need to know your soil mixes and know what they look like when they are wet as well as dry. The difficulty is knowing what it looks like when it is frozen. A couple of weeks ago the outside temperature was 7 degrees Fahrenheit. It was a sunny day and I decided to check the thermometer in the conifer hut. I was pleased to see that the temperature in that hut was 22 degrees F. When I looked at the soil surface in the pots they looked bone dry. I know from many years of experience that when the soil is frozen, it looks dry. That fact was verified when, a few weeks, the outside temperature rose to the lower 60's. When I checked inside the huts, I noted that the soil surface in most all of the pots was uniformly moist. Some of the smaller trees were looking a bit dry so I did water them well. I find that I only need to water in the huts about once a month. That may mean that I have to water with snow if available or carry buckets out and spot water.

A few of my trees require special conditions. Last summer I realized one of my dreams of finally owning a California Juniper. Now I have 3 of them. At the onset of winter, I contacted a couple of my mentors, Ted Matson and Ryan Neil and asked them where I should store these trees. I had them stored in my conifer hut at the end of fall. Both told me that they should not be allowed to fall below the mid 20's so I moved them to the garage. My garage stays around 40 degrees F with the door shut so it makes a perfect place to store them as well as some of the trees that require more of a temperate environment. Many of my nicer shohin trees are in there as well. The problem with the garage is that they tend to dry out fast. I water at least twice a week. I found that the shohin trees dry out especially fast. Last year I decided to

employ the same method of keeping them moist as I do during the summertime. Storage tubs were purchased and small holes were punctured in the bottom for drainage. Then they were filled half way with Turface and were drenched with water. The shohin trees were placed in the Turface and their pots were sunk about half way. This is an excellent method to keep them from drying out too fast.

Even though I wire trees all year long, winter is a perfect time to do that. They are dormant and can be easily wired and shaped. It is important that you pay close attention to new buds that form during the winter. They are all potential new branches. It is also a perfect time to perform needle plucking of your pines.

January and February is also the perfect time for sowing seeds. I start this task in the late summer and fall by collecting seeds from trees that I want to grow. Last year I found several Trident Maples and a Japanese Hornbeam in my neighborhood. After obtaining permission from their owners, I proceeded to collect the seed and placed them in Ziplock baggies. I stored them in my garage until January. Last weekend I placed the seed on plastic bowls and ran tap water in my kitchen sink until it was as hot as possible. I then added water for the bowls and stirred them well. It is important to ensure that all of the seeds are saturated. Make sure you label them as well. After about 24 hours the viable seeds will sink to the bottom, in most cases. I drain the water from the seed and sow the seeds in flats of Turface and cover them with a layer too. Make sure they are watered well and place outdoors in the cold. I use clear plastic tubs with lids so that light can get in but the critters stay out. When the spring thaw begins, the seeds start germinating. By May I have thousands of new seedlings!

As for tropicals, if you keep your trees indoors, water as needed. Keep a close eye on them for pests and diseases and treat them appropriately. Cut back fertilizing to once a month. If you have a heated greenhouse you should be noticing a new flush of growth on most trees. This all depends on the temperature you keep and the available sunlight.

(reprinted/edited)

# Understanding What Makes a Good Viewing Stone

Scott Yelich

I think that it is a safe assumption that people have been fascinated with stones since the beginning of time. Most of us have been picking up rocks since we were toddlers. The desire to grasp and look at things that interest us is a common human trait. Maybe that's also why we are bonsai enthusiasts, too. With bonsai, we can pick up an old tree and hold it up to our face so we can study it and appreciate it. How cool is that! Bonsai and Suiseki (the Japanese art of stone appreciation) are very similar. Often, these arts are used to compliment one another.

Like every other kid, I'm sure I picked up my first rock at a very early age. I've never outgrown the desire to pick up a shiny or interesting rock. Although I pick up rocks that I find pleasing, a basic understanding of Suiseki has made me a little more choosy.

In order to better understand Suiseki, it's good to know a few terms and guidelines. First, there are a couple of different ways of looking at stones. You have the Japanese 'Suiseki' viewing stones and Chinese 'Gongshi' viewing stones, and they differ similarly as how 'Bonsai' differs from 'Penjing.' What makes a good viewing stone differs slightly by one's culture. The Japanese tend to have a more 'natural' influence while the Chinese tend to have a more 'dramatic' influence. A good Suiseki tends to be a naturally formed stone that resembles or calls to mind a scene from nature. Stones that resemble mountains or waterfalls would be good examples. A good Gongshi (or scholar's stone) tends to be more abstract or perhaps animal-shaped. It is more common for the Chinese to carve on the stones to achieve the desired look. Stones that I'm most attracted to are the ones that have interesting shapes, colors and textures. Stones which have particularly flat bases are also appealing. I often pick up more stones than I need. Not every rock I find becomes a viewing stone. It's not uncommon for me to come home with a bucket of rocks. Then, I'll wash them and give them a second look.

Many end up in the pile of rocks I use for Penjing landscapes. I try to pick up only 'good' stones, but they aren't all 'good enough' for me to use as a viewing or accent stone. I also tend to pick up stones when I am visiting different places. In this manner, a viewing stone is not only about looks. Gazing at it reminds me of places I have been or things I have done.

We gaze at stones for different reasons. Sometimes, the stone is the sole focus. In this case, a rock is considered a viewing stone. It is common for a viewing stone to be displayed alone, or in a group of other viewing stones. Suiseki ties into bonsai when the stone is used as an 'accent stone.' As an accent stone, the stone has a different purpose. Now, it's the stone's purpose to compliment the bonsai in a display. A stone that distracts too much from the bonsai tree would be a poor choice for the 'accent stone' role. Accent stones need to be the right size, shape and color to fulfill its support role in a formal display. When preparing for a formal display, I might try six or seven viewing stones next to a bonsai so I can select a proper accent stone. A good accent stone for one tree might be poor accent stone for another tree.

Like bonsai, viewing stones tie us to nature. A good viewing stone is something that you might find visually interesting, but it might also be something which brings your mind back to a certain time or place. Some viewing stones can be used to accent our bonsai trees during formal shows or settings. I admit, I really enjoy displaying my trees at shows. Still, I find it even more enjoyable when I can show off some of my favorite trees accompanied by some of my favorite rocks!



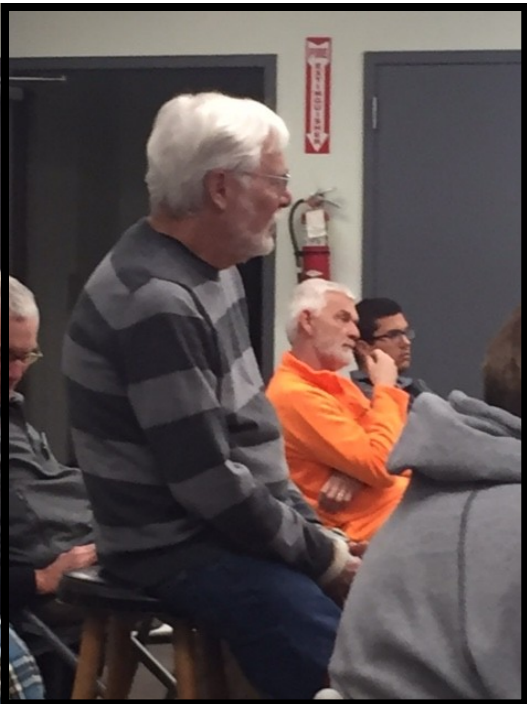
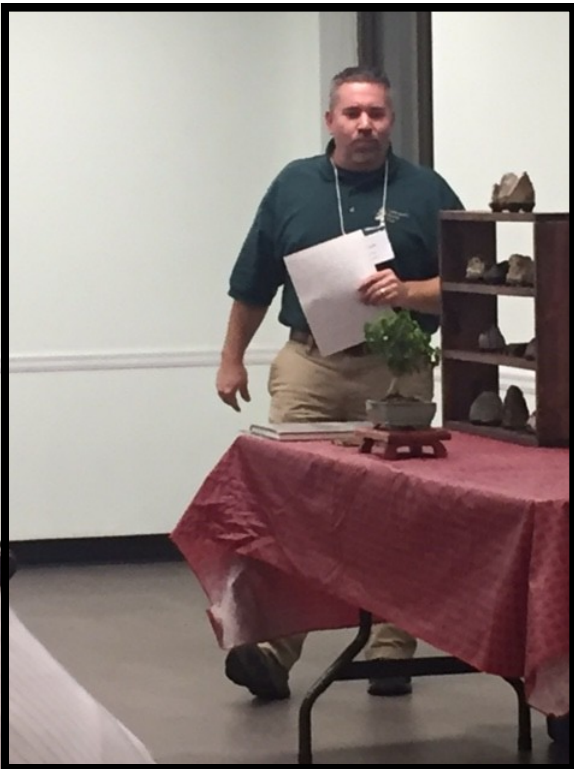


Date 2016	Meeting Topic	Detail	Presenter - Coordinator	
1/6	pots	Pottery Presentation Short program on viewing stones	Mike Thiedeman Scott Yelich	
2/3	Pinch Pots	Pinch Pots workshop with Paul Weishaar Short program on making pinch pots & small slab pots	Paul Weishaar	
3/2	Making Stands	Bonsai Stands workshop Short program on assembling and finishing a bonsai stand	Scott Yelich & Paul Weishaar	
4/6	Kusumono	Kusumono workshop Short program on Kusumono	Amanda Cox	
5/4	Larch workshop	American Larch Workshop Short Program on American Larch care	Paul Weishaar Mark Fields	
6/1	Display Setting	Setting a bonsai display Short program - How to set a bonsai for formal display	Mark fields	
7/6	Tropicals	Tropical Workshop/ Short Program: Tropical Care	Scott Yelich	
8/3	State Fair Judge -Demo	Bonsai Demonstration	Jim Doyle	
9/7	Annual "Members Only" Auction	Sell/Buy any Bonsai related item	Scott Yelich	
10/5	BYOT Workshop	BYOT Nominations for 2017-2018 club officers	Scott Yelich All	
11/2	Elections	Club election of executive officers	All	
12/7	Annual Dinner	The Annual Gala Celebration	All	

## IBC Financial\$ 1/15/2016

<b>Checking</b>	<b>\$526.47</b>
<b>Savings</b>	<b>\$10,089.65</b>





**January 6, 2016**



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# Club Information

*Visitors are always WELCOME!!!*

Where: Garfield Park Conservatory  
2450 Shelby Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana

When: First Wednesday of each  
month

Time: 7:00 pm

Club Dues: Dues are \$25 per calendar  
year. Cost includes (up to)  
two members of the same  
household.

## Club Officers 2015-2017

President	Scott Yelich
Vice President	Carl Wooldridge
Asst. Vice Presidents	Robert Hoy Kyle Weidner
Secretary	Amanda Cox
Treasurer/Newsletter	Robert Hoy
Past President	Mark Fields
Membership	Jason Parrish
Web Master	Scott Yelich
Volunteers	Steve Dick
Historian	John Strassburg
Librarian	Tom Barnes
MABA/ABS/BCI	Paul Weishaar
Garfield Curator(s)	Chuck Perry Carl Woodridge Robert Hoy

**Checkout the IBC website:**

**[www.indybonsai.org](http://www.indybonsai.org)**